

CHAPTER THREE

SINOIFICATION OF XINJIANG SINCE 1949

3.1 Establishment of the XUAR

On 25 September 1949, Governor Burhan of the Xinjiang Provincial Government and General Tao Chen-yo, the Commander of the KMT garrison surrendered to the People's Liberation Army (PLA), thereby ending the KMT's rule over Xinjiang. The PLA successfully took over the province of Xinjiang without much resistance. On 19 December 1949, a coalition government was established, consisting of officials of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Turkic Muslims who were former leaders of the ETR. Burhan was appointed as governor with Saifuddin as his vice-governor. In September 1952, during the Second Meeting of the First Provincial People's Conference of Representatives of Nationalities and Social Group, the decision to adopt the resolution to grant Xinjiang the status of autonomous region was made and therefore a preparatory committee was establish for that purpose.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was very careful in granting autonomy to Xinjiang and the Turkic Muslims although it was more flexible in granting autonomous status to other national minorities such as the Huis and Mongols, who had been granted the right of self-government after the Liberation in 1949. It took the CCP almost six years (1949-55) to grant Xinjiang an autonomous status, the delay mainly due to mutual suspicion and distrust. The Turkics' involvement in two major rebellions in 1933 and 1944 to free themselves from the Chinese for the past 20 years did not help the CCP to

trust them at all and hence the reluctance of the CCP to grant them the status of autonomous region in 1949. In fact the level of distrust was so high that the CCP had to undertake preventive measures between 1950-53 to eliminate anti-Chinese elements before granting the right of self-government to the Turkic Muslims.

The CCP had to eliminate the influence of the former ETR leaders whose influence was ingrained among the Turkic community. To curb their influence, many were transferred to other districts. Although it appeared as though the CCP wanted to promote the former leaders of ETR for fighting against the KMT, in reality the CCP was isolating these leaders from the rest of the Turkic community. In 1950, the CCP reorganized the provincial government by dividing it into three administrative districts, a move that caused many leaders of the former ETR to be transferred into new departments, hence resulting in their influence to decrease. The CCP also felt threatened by the Sinkiang League for Peace and Democracy (SLPD), which was originally a political arm of the ETR that was set up on 1 August 1948. It consisted of radical Turkic political parties from Ili, Altai and Tacheng whose aims were to liberate Xinjiang from the Chinese and improve the standard of living of the Turkics. Most of its leaders were educated in the Soviet Union, amongst whom were Akhmedjan Kasimov, Ishakin Monhakiyer and Rakimjan.¹ The SLPD was based in Kulja and boasted a membership of 77,394 in 1950. The leadership of the SLPD was taken over by Burhan and Saifudin because the leaders

¹ Lee Pu Hsiang, "The Turkic-Muslim Problem in Sinkiang: A Case Study of the Chinese Communists Nationality Policy," Ph.D. Thesis, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1973, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1987, p. 164.

of the SLPD died in a mysterious plane crash in 1949.² Burhan and Saifudin were Turkic leaders who had earlier allied themselves with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

In June 1950, the SLPD organised a congress in Urumqi and the Chinese Communist leaders of Xinjiang, Hsu Li-ching and Kao Chin-chun, were invited to attend. As a result, the SLPD was reorganised and known as the People's Democratic League of Sinkiang (PDLS). The membership included an additional of five Han Chinese and one Hui who were elected as members of the executive committee. Since then, the PDLS became a pro-Chinese Communist organisation and this resulted in the Turkic Muslims loss of confidence in the PDLS. In fact, the PDLS was desolved in 1953 and the provincial government disbanded the Ining National Army (INA) that had fought for the independence of Xinjiang. Many of the former military leaders of the INA were transferred to Beijing on promotion, with the aim of isolating them from the Turkic community.

The CCP further consolidated its position in Xinjiang by eliminating the traditional positions of Muslim religious teachers such as the *ahungs* and mullahs. The Turkic Muslims were granted the rights of self-government in 1954 and granted Xinjiang the status of autonomous region only after eliminating the influence of the ETR, SLPD and the Muslim religious teachers. In 1954, Xinjiang was divided into 16 autonomous *chu* or sub-counties with six autonomous *hsiang* or counties. The six autonomous counties were the Yen-Chi Hui, Chapchar Sibo, Mu-lei Kazakh, Ho-po-ke-sai-erh Mongol, Ta-shi-ku-

² Morris Rossabi, China and Inner Asia, From 1368 to the Present Day, London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, p. 275.

erh-kan Tajik and Ba-li-kun Kazakh.³ In addition, that there were also five autonomous *chou* or prefectures the Ba-yin-ko leng, Po-lo-ta-la Mongol , Chang-chi Hui, Ke-tze-lei-su Kirghiz and Ili Kazakh.⁴

The Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) was formed on 1 October 1955 and all the autonomous *chu* and *chou* were multi-nationals in terms of their ethnic composition. In this way, the Chinese Communist authorities were able to control the strength and growth of each ethnic group. An autonomous *chou* was granted flexibility in the collection of taxes and in managing its income and expenditure. The establishment of the XUAR was a watershed in the history of the Turkic community living in Xinjiang because prior to Communist rule, they were never permitted to participate in any form of administrative activities. This change brought peace, as there was no rebellion from the Turkic community between 1949-1956. During that period, the Turkic community was hopeful that the CCP would eventually grant them independence and hence they willingly co-operated with the CCP, unlike the usual hostility that was shown to the previous Chinese governments. From 1949 till 1956, the CCP adopted the policy of appeasement towards the Turkics and anti-Han chauvinist campaigns were carried out by the CCP. In July 1952, the Resolution Regarding the Correction of Han Chinese Chauvinism was adopted at the CCP Central Committee.⁵ In the early 1950s, the CCP advocated the principle of equality amongst the various nationalities in Xinjiang, marking a significant change because no earlier Chinese rulers had taken such a step. The Turkic communities

³ "The Ili Kazakh Autonomous Chou," Central Asia Review, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1967, p. 168.

⁴ Ibid.

were taken aback by the action of the CCP. Moreover Turkic nationalism had begun to weaken with the USSR withdrawing all support to the former leaders of the ETR mainly due to the Sino-Soviet Alliance Treaty of 1950 that dealt a severe blow to Turkic nationalist movement.

3.2 Sinofication of the XUAR

The Turkic Muslim leaders were too naïve at that time as they were easily lured by the CCP into believing that it would grant them independence. In 1956 and 1957, the CCP opened itself to free criticism of its policies in the so-called “Hundred Flowers Campaign.” In April 1957 during the Democratic Symposium organised by the CCP Xinjiang Committee, the Turkic leaders officially expressed their nationalist aspirations and grievances towards the Chinese.⁶ These demands included the change of name for Xinjiang or ‘New Territory’ to East Turkestan or Uighurtsan, suspension of Han migration to the province, increased prominence to Turkics in the provincial government, postponement of the socialist transformation programme based on the Maoist doctrine which was opposed to the Islamic teachings and finally, cession from China through the process of national self-determination. The demands of the Turkic nationalists were made public in the Sinkiang Daily and People’s Daily.⁷ The Turkic nationalists based their claims for independence on Lenin’s doctrine of national self-determination because they were dissatisfied with the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) that was

⁵ Lee Pu Hsiang, “The Turkic-Muslim Problem in Sinkiang: A Case Study of the Chinese Communists Nationality Policy,” Ph.D. Thesis, New York: Columbia University, 1973, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1987, p. 328.

⁶ Chulamuddin Pahta, “Changing Muslim Status in Eastern Turkestan,” Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol. 7, No. 2, January 1986, p. 130.

⁷ Lee Pu Hsiang, “The Turkic-Muslim Problem in Sinkiang: A Case Study of the Chinese Communists Nationality Policy,” p. 337.

considered a 'tool' used by Beijing to colonise the province. The Turkic nationalists also proposed to replace the name XUAR with Eastern Turkestan or Uighurstan as Xinjiang or 'New Territory' seemed to symbolise Chinese rule over the region. To them, East Turkestan reflected an image of national independence. The Turkics also hated the Xinjiang Production-Construction Corps, which they accused as colonists that occupied the farms of the natives and forced them to move to uncultivated land. The Turkic nationalists had thought that the CCP would at least consider these demands but instead, the CCP became were unrelenting.

The CCP tried to persuade the Turkic Muslim nationalists to renounce their demands through a conference on the Administrative Affairs of the National Minorities held in Shantung province from July till August 1957. Among the top PRC officials present were Chairman Mao Zedong and Prime Minister Chou En-lai. The Turkic delegates expressed similar demands during the conference and as such angered Chairman Mao and as a result of this showdown, the CCP took steps to eliminate all Turkic nationalists and separatists by staging a political purge. Many Turkic nationalists were expelled from the CCP and sent to *laogai* (labour camps) for ideological reform. Justifying the Chinese action Wang Enmao, First Secretary of the CCP Xinjiang Committee commented that:⁸

The local nationalists deserve indeed a severe punishment for what they have said and done. Nevertheless we should place emphasis on ideological correction rather than disciplinary actions.

⁸ Ibid., p. 339.

From 1957 till 1959, there were 30,000 to 35,000 Turkics detained in labour camps through out Xinjiang.⁹

Towards the end of 1957, the PRC adopted an ambitious plan to end the ethnic conflict in Xinjiang and reconstruct the ethnic identity of the Turkics. Because the Chinese were convinced that their culture and civilization was more superior than that of Turkics, they believed that the only solution to maintain Chinese rule over Xinjiang was to convert the Turkics to become Chinese. As a result, Turkic Muslims living in Xinjiang were not allowed to maintain their own culture, tradition, religion and language and even forbidden to maintain their own Turkic names. They were pressured to use Chinese names and adopt Chinese culture and language. In fact, during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, the Turkic Muslims were also forbidden to practice their faith whereby the teachings of Islam were replaced by Marxist-Maoist ideology.

Unlike the previous administrations, the process of 'sinofication' was implemented in a gradual manner. At first, the CCP eliminated the Turkic nationalists who were considered anti-revolutionary and in turn pro Chinese Turkic leaders were appointed by the CCP as their 'spokespersons' of the Turkic community. The process of 'sinofication' was also intended to eliminate the influence of the USSR in Xinjiang because the former had been influential in Xinjiang during the administration of General Sheng Shih-tsai in the 1930s. In fact, most professionals like doctors and engineers in Xinjiang were

⁹ Geoffrey Wheeler, "Sinkiang and the Soviet Union," *The China Quarterly*, No. 16, 1963, p. 69. See also Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia*, London: Thames Hudson, 1975, p. 279.

Russians.¹⁰ The mining industry in Xinjiang too was controlled by Russian companies and the Central Asia region was already under the influence of the Soviets.¹¹ Beginning from 1927 Soviet power spread to states like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan¹² and because of the USSR's widespread influence, the region came to be known as Soviet Central Asia.¹³ The Chinese felt threatened by the presence of the USSR in Central Asia as they feared the latter would make use of its position in Xinjiang to attack China especially during the Sino-Soviet rivalry. Therefore, the Chinese were convinced to 'sinoize' Xinjiang vis-à-vis the USSR. During the Sino-USSR rivalry in the 1960s and 1970s, there were border clashes between the Chinese and USSR in around Xinjiang. As a result, the PRC militarized Xinjiang and ultimately turned it into its forward defence against the USSR. In addition, the militarisation of Xinjiang was also a pre-emptive measure against any future Turkic uprising.

Moreover, the Chinese leaders in Beijing made use of the sinofication policy in Xinjiang to eliminate their personal political rivals within the CCP whereby popular personalities that posed a threat to the leadership of Mao Zedong were persecuted. Wang Enmao, the First Secretary of the XUAR was transferred Beijing¹⁴ whilst Chang Tung yueh, the Vice President of Xinjiang University who was accused of going against Mao Zedong was sent to a labour camp.¹⁵

¹⁰ Li Chang, "The Soviet Grip on Sinkiang," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 3, April 1954, p. 495.

¹¹ Olaf Caroe, "Soviet Colonialism in Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 1, October 1953, p. 135-144.

¹² Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, London: Morrison & Gribb, 1964, p. 56.

¹³ Ponniah Thoolasydass, "Central Asia Response to Soviet Hegemony 1917-65," B.A. Dissertation, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 1969, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Central Asia Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1967, p. 188.

3.2.1 The Influx of Chinese Hans

The central government was aware that the various programmes introduced to integrate Xinjiang were unsuccessful mainly due to the small number of Chinese in Xinjiang to implement these programmes. In fact, the major reason that caused the failure to 'sinofy' Xinjiang in the past was the lack of a substantial Chinese population in the province. Hence, in order to fully integrate and unite the people of Xinjiang under Chinese rule, Beijing ordered Han Chinese to migrate to Xinjiang so as to reduce the influence of Turkic Muslims.¹⁶ The mass influx of Hans to Xinjiang was justified as providing manpower for economic development. In fact, prior to 1949, there were only 300,000 Hans living in Xinjiang. Due to this mass transmigration, there are now more than six million Hans living in Xinjiang. On Chinese migration into Xinjiang, Hu Yaobang, the former CCP Secretary of Xinjiang commented that, "Northwest China (Xinjiang) could easily absorb 200 million Chinese settlers."¹⁷ The mass migration and colonisation programme effectively started in 1956. Although there was Han migration between 1950 till 1955, the number was rather small, and among these early Chinese migrants were Chinese youths and intellectuals from interior China with the majority of the youths being technical workers and teachers. Members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were also among those who settled in Xinjiang. Apart from them, criminals were sent to labour camps in Xinjiang and were forbidden to return to central China upon their release. They subsequently settled down in Xinjiang and were known as *bintuan*

¹⁵ *Central Asia Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1967, p. 173.

¹⁶ Barbara Pillsbury, *Cohesion and Cleavage In A Chinese Muslim*, PhD. Thesis, New York: Columbia University, 1973, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1975, p. 20.

¹⁷ *The Wall Street Journal*, 15 June 1993.

(reformed farmers). At presently the total estimated number of reformed farmers in Xinjiang is one million.¹⁸

The migration of Hans intensified in 1960s with the completion of the Lanchow-Xinjiang railway that linked central China with Xinjiang via the Kansu Corridor. The Xinjiang Branch CCP depended on the Xinjiang Production-Construction Corps (XPCC) to carry out the project of migration. The XPCC was a semi-military organisation established in 1954 by Beijing to implement central government policies in Xinjiang and was responsible in providing Han immigrants with accommodation upon their arrival. The XPCC also contribute to economic activities by providing labour force to the mining industry.

As a result of the Chinese immigration plan, the percentage of Uighur population in Xinjiang dropped tremendously. In 1949, the Uighur population was 3,291,145 or 75.9 per cent while the population of the Kazakhs was 443,655 or 2 per cent. The 291,021 Hans only formed a mere 6.7 per cent but by 1984, the Han population had increased to 5,346,267 or 39.7 per cent. There was an increase of 5,055,246 within 35 years (1949-1984) -- the result of mass migration into Xinjiang.¹⁹ On the other hand, the 75 per cent of Uighurs living in Xinjiang in 1953 shrunk to 55 per cent in 1982 and in 1990, they formed only 45 per cent of Xinjiang's total population. This was a big contrast with the growing Han population in Xinjiang. In 1953, the percentage of Hans living in Xinjiang

¹⁸ <http://www.uygur.org>

¹⁹ Cuiyi Wei, "An Historical Survey of Modern Uighur Writing since the 1950s in Xinjiang China," *Central Asia Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 1993, p. 252.

was only 6 per cent but increased to 40 per cent by 1982. In 1990 the percentage of Hans in Xinjiang was 43 per cent whilst the Uighurs amounted to 45 per cent of Xinjiang's total population.²⁰

On this, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, a former Turkic nationalist who had migrated to Turkey stated in an interview with The New York Times in 1970 that: "Estimated that because of large-scale migration in recent years there were now nearly four million ethnic Chinese in Xinjiang."²¹ With the mass migration of Hans to Xinjiang, the Uighurs ended up marginalised, and ironically became second-class citizens in their own land. To exemplify this predicament, the Uighur community composed a *dirge* (poem) whispered among themselves on the occasion of a death of Chinese settlers:²²

You come by the thousands,
You go one by one,
When shall you come to an end?
Oh dear brother of mine!

The CCP also encouraged mixed marriages between Hans and Turkic Muslims where special incentives were offered to encourage mixed marriages for the purpose assimilating the Uighurs with the Hans. For example a Chinese girl who married a Uighur was given 1000 yuan by the government²³ and a Uighur man who married a Chinese girl, was rewarded with 2000 yuan and promised a better job.²⁴ A heavy penalty of 4000 yuan in alimony was imposed on any Uighur who wanted to divorce his Chinese

²⁰ <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/6807/UGHUR.html>

²¹ Lee Pu Hsing, "The Turkic-Muslim Problem in Sinkiang: A Case Study of the Chinese Communists Nationality Policy," p. 317. See also The New York Times, March 2, 1970.

²² <http://www.uygur.org>

²³ Erkin Alptekin, "Chinese Policy in Eastern Turkestan," Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 1992, p. 192.

wife. Also, the children born of the mixed marriages were automatically registered as ethnic Chinese.²⁵ Beijing justified the mixed marriage policy by claiming it to be the means to foster closer relations between the Hans and Turkic Muslims. In fact, even an institute known as Chun Tang was established to encourage intermarriages between Chinese and Turkic Muslims.

The population of the Turkics decreased as a result of the coercive birth control policy in Xinjiang. Uighurs living in cities like Urumqi, Kashgar were restricted to have only two children while those who lived in rural areas could only have three children. The Chinese on the other hand were allowed to have two children irrespective of whether they lived in cities or rural areas. Beijing justified the coercive birth control as a way to ensure a steady growth in the minority population as well as eliminate economic inequalities. Many Turkic pregnant women were forced to abort their babies and subsequently undergo sterilisation. As one can see, the coercive birth control policy was against the teachings of Islam and caused many deaths among Turkic women and children. On this one Uighur health officer in an interview with the Newsweek stated that: "If our children are limited, we soon will disappear."²⁶ According to the East Turkestan National Center which was based in Istanbul, forced abortions were performed on Turkic couples who were unable to pay the fine. In fact, in the Toksu County, 846 Turkic women had to undergo forced abortions in 1991 and about 17 people died from these abortions.²⁷ The Amnesty International received reports and complaints from

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Newsweek, 10 October 1990.

²⁷ Ibid.

Turkic women who were subjected to these abortions. It also resulted in many social ills such as the abandonment of babies because Turkic couples were unable to pay the fine for exceeding the prescribed number of children on the one hand and were forbidden to abort pregnancies being forbidden by Islam on the other. There was also a high rate of divorce among Turkics as a result of such pressures.

3.2.2 Language Reforms and Indoctrination

The Turkic Muslim communities had been using Arabic script in their language since the 10th century. The Turkic dailies such as the Sherk Hekikite (East Truth) and Kazakh Eli (Kazakh People) had been published in Arabic since 1937.²⁸ In the 1950s, following the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance 1954 between the PRC and USSR, Russian Cyrillic script was introduced to replace Arabic. However, the Turkics did not oppose the plan because of the strong USSR influence in Xinjiang during that time. Furthermore, a majority of the other Turkics living in the Soviet Central Asia also used the Cyrillic script. In fact, since 1954, Cyrillic had been taught in Xinjiang schools and in February 1957, the Xinjiang Daily was published in Cyrillic.²⁹ However, the plan to use the Cyrillic script was short lived because Sino-Soviet relations began to deteriorate in the late-1950s. The use Cyrillic came to an abrupt end in 1960 and was replaced by Latin alphabets. The Turkic Muslims adopted the Latin alphabet as the common basis of the Chinese Phoneticization plan. On this former Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-lai stated that:³⁰

²⁸ Cuiyi Wei, "An Historical Survey of Modern Uighur Writing since the 1950s in Xinjiang China," p. 261.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 271.

³⁰ Lee Fu Hsing, "The Turkic-Muslim Problem in Sinkiang: A Case Study of the Chinese Communists Nationality Policy," p. 291.

In the course of creating or reforming the written languages of national minorities hereafter the Latin alphabet should be used as the basis in principle. Meanwhile, the letters of the Latin alphabet which will have been adapted in the newly-designed written languages of national minorities should be pronounced and used in accordance with the rules of the Chinese Phoneticization Plan as far as possible.

The Uighur and Kazakh languages were latinized in 1960³¹ and the central government planned to 'sinocize' the literary language of the Uighurs as well, carried out under the pretext of unification of the motherland. Prior to 1960, the Uighur language had very few Chinese terms but this began to change upon the assimilation programme where many Uighur terms were sinocized or even replaced with Chinese terms. In the 1960s, the CCP carried out a massive destruction of 370,00 manuscripts in Urumqi, all written in Arabic and included the Holy Quran and Hadith.

Apart from the language reform policy, the CCP also encouraged the study of Chinese language in Xinjiang. Under a regulation of the Provincial People's Government of Xinjiang adopted in 1951, the study of Chinese language became one of the criteria for employment recruitment and promotion.³² However, unlike Chinese schools, Uighur schools did not receive any funding from the provincial government. Students from non-Chinese schools had to spend an extra year of intensive study of the Chinese language before they could enroll in colleges because all colleges had started using Chinese as their medium of instruction in 1960. On this policy, Ahbitijam, an Uighur technical cadre in the Postal and Telegraph Office commented:³³

³¹ *Central Asia Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1967, p. 91.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 299.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 300. See also *Sinkiang Daily*, 6 June 1957.

There existed a prejudice in our office. A national minority cadre must be able to understand and speak Chinese if he wants to have something done. Why should the national minority cadres be required to speak Chinese while they are living and working for their own autonomous region?

Turkic youths were deprived of higher education and most of them only received primary education when compared to the Han settlers. At present, almost 70 per cent of the schools in Xinjiang use Chinese as the medium of instruction.³⁴ There were 52.3 per cent of Uighur children studying in primary schools and 31.5 per cent studying in secondary schools. There were 40 per cent of Uighur youths who were studying in technical colleges and there were only 20 per cent of Uighurs lecturers in institutions of higher education in Xinjiang.³⁵ Although Beijing claimed that the central government sponsored many students from Xinjiang to study abroad but the majority of them are Chinese migrants and Turkics. After 1969, as a result of Sino-Soviet rivalry, the CCP began to cultivate the loyalty of the Turkics in Xinjiang by making many concessions relating to the language policy for example reinstating the Arabic script in 1980.

The CCP also had ambitions to change the history of Xinjiang. History textbooks published by the government stated that the Turkics were part of the Great Han race during the Stone Age, a measure that grossly undermined Turkic tradition. On China's attempts to distort local history, an article in the Daily Report of 13 February 1967 asserted that:³⁶

The Uighur children have no opportunity to study their own history in schools. Distorting the truth and historical facts the Chinese repeated over and over to our children that the Uighurs are of Chinese origin.

³⁴ Erkin Alptekin, "Chinese Policy in Eastern Turkestan," p. 191.

³⁵ Far East Economic Review, 29 August 1985.

³⁶ Daily Report, 13 February 1967.

Most research on Xinjiang was sponsored by the Chinese authorities and published in Chinese, thereby neglecting the Turkic language. Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Mao Zedong's writings and the history of the Chinese Communist revolution were taught in schools, with the aim inculcating patriotism and eliminating Turkic nationalism as well as USSR influence. The reinterpretation of Xinjiang's history was aimed at reducing Turkic xenophobia against the Hans as well as encouraging their allegiance to Beijing. The CCP accused the Turkic nationalists of receiving support from foreign imperialists who wanted to oppress local communities. They cited examples like British India as supporters of Yakub Beg's rebellion and the USSR as supporters of the ETR.³⁷ The CCP further claimed that the previous rebellions were actually attempts by foreign imperialists to colonise Xinjiang. Chinese schools in Xinjiang received much more government assistance and had better facilities than Turkic schools. With increasing Han population in Xinjiang, the Turkics would eventually end up being a minority in their own land. On this development a Turkic nationalist in exile, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, stated that: "the Uighurs are like pandas: on the verge of extinction."³⁸

The 48 years (1949-97) of PRC rule over Xinjiang resulted in the loss Turkic culture and heritage such that today, many Turkic youths are unable to speak or write in the native language – a result of over emphasising Mandarin schools. Turkic history too was distorted with claims that the Turkics originated from the Hans centuries ago.

³⁷ Central Asia Review, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1967, p. 285.

³⁸ Ibid.

3.2.3 Religious Persecution: Communism versus Islam

The CCP felt threatened by Muslim religious leaders who occupied very important position within the Turkic Muslim community. In fact, these religious zealots became a competing force against the CCP for allegiance of the locals. Moreover, in the past Muslim religious leaders had played a major role in instigating the people to rebel against the Chinese such as the khojas in the 19th century. Besides that, the CCP also felt threatened by the influence of the Islamic faith especially because it is not merely confined to spiritual aspects but in fact posed a threat to Communist ideology politically. The CCP planned to curtail the influence of the Muslim religious leaders and eventually eliminate the Islamic faith especially during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s.

As such, the CCP implemented drastic measures to destroy the influence of Islam in Xinjiang through various methods. Firstly, the Provincial Government of Xinjiang abolished the rights of Muslim leaders to collect *zakat* (religious tithe) even though it is fundamental to Islam. Subsequently, land and properties owned by Muslim leaders were confiscated by the CCP under the pretext of Land Reform³⁹ and mosques were ordered to display portraits of Mao Zedong in prayer halls. Further, communist cadres were assigned to propagate the Communist doctrine during Islamic religious prayers.⁴⁰ Private religious schools were discontinued and their students transferred to primary schools where Marxism and Maoism were taught. In fact, in 1966, the CCP officially declared its intention to wipe out the Islamic faith from China⁴¹ such that it was alleged that the Red Guards were ordered to burn the Holy Quran and Islamic religious books. Mosques were

³⁹ Far East Economic Review, 19 September 1960.

⁴⁰ <http://www.uyghur.com>

closed and desecrated by breeding pigs within the compound where once these religious institutions stood and *ahungs* (religious teachers) were forced to attend to pig farms.⁴²

Many Turkic leaders were martyred during the Cultural Revolution because they were suspected of being counter revolutionaries, amongst them Imam Muhammad Amin of Kypek village in the Kulja district. He was the religious leader who performed the *istisqa* (prayers for special intentions) for rainfall in the arid year of 1968 and his popularity grew when it started to rain contrary to the official weather forecast. His growing popularity was deemed a threat so much so that the CCP accused him of counter revolutionary activities and executed him in 1969.⁴³ As a result of this smear campaign against the Muslim leaders, the mullahs, *ahungs* and imams completely lost their social, economic and political privileges. The Chinese government zealously cracked down on activities that were suspected of supporting Turkic nationalism, including peaceful religious activities. The government systematically perpetrated gross human rights violations against the Turkics including arbitrary and summary executions without trial. According to the Amnesty International and Asia Watch, most of the victims of arbitrary arrests were Turkic activists who peacefully exercised their fundamental rights to freedom of expression and freedom of dissent via the distribution of anti-government or pro-independence literature.⁴⁴ The Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch also stated that the XUAR was the only province in China where political prisoners were

⁴¹ M. Ali Kettani, Muslim Minorities in the World Today, London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1986, p. 101.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Detained in China and Tibet: A Directory of Political and Religious Prisoners, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994, p. 222.

executed.⁴⁵ Turkic political detainees were also frequently subjected to torture and some were left physically and mentally scarred.⁴⁶ Cruel and inhuman methods were used to force innocent detainees confess alleged wrong doings and some of these methods included inserting horse's hair into male prisoners' penises, using electric wires to give powerful electric shocks, exposing prisoners to extreme heat or cold, allowing Chinese male criminals to rape women political prisoners and pulling political prisoners' fingernails out.⁴⁷ All these amounted to blatant violations of the United Nations Convention Against Torture, which China ratified in 1988. In the 1980s, however, the CCP took a more conciliatory approach towards Islam in Xinjiang as a result of Sino-Soviet rivalry.

3.2.4 Militarisation of Xinjiang

As stated in Chapter One, Xinjiang is of strategic importance to China's security. In fact, even General Tso Tsung-tang of the Ching Dynasty believed that the security of China depended on the defence of Xinjiang against any foreign invaders especially the Russians.⁴⁸ Ever since the PRC took over Xinjiang in 1949, it increased the presence of the military in the province so as to protect it from foreign intrusion. As such, China's western frontier regions increased in strategic importance in the view of the Beijing government. These frontier regions were known as the Urumqi Military Region (UMR).⁴⁹ Beijing implemented measures to strengthen the defence of Xinjiang by sending more

⁴⁵ Andrew J. Nathan, "Human Rights in Chinese Foreign Policy," *The China Quarterly*, No. 139, September 1994, p. 633.

⁴⁶ http://www.taklamakan.org/ai_xuar_report.html

⁴⁷ *Uyghur Human Rights Coalition 2000*.

⁴⁸ Harrison Salisbury, "Marco Polo Would Recognise Mao's Sinkiang," *New York Times Magazine*, 23 November 1969, p. 19.

Han Chinese soldiers into Xinjiang especially during the period of Sino-Soviet rivalry. Although the PRC stressed on the idea of a 'people's war,' the local minorities of Uighurs, Kazakhs and Uzbeks in Xinjiang could not be relied upon to defend the interests and sovereignty of China. The Chinese authorities could neither trust nor promote a Turkic officer to the rank of commander in the army because of suspicion. Therefore, they had to solely rely on the Han Chinese soldiers who were transported from central China. Furthermore, the transfer of Chinese soldiers would strengthen Chinese position against the possibility of any insurgency and separatist movement organised by the Turkics. Only a few non-Han officers reached the top levels of the UMR Command. For example, Seypidin, a Uighur, held the post of First Political Commissar in the UMR as well as First Secretary of the XUAR CCP Committee until he was removed in early 1978.

Chinese military presence in Xinjiang was situated in three major locations. The first was the important and strategic Northern Xinjiang Military District (NXMD) that covered Western Dzungaria and the Ili River Valley. In 1969, border clashes between the PLA and USSR forces took place in this area. There were two infantry divisions stationed in the NXMD and one armored division to protect Urumqi, the provincial capital. The second was the Eastern Xinjiang Military District (EXMD), given the main responsibility of defending and ensuring the safety of Lop Nur, one of the main sites for Chinese nuclear testing. The EXMD was equipped with ballistic missiles, array radar and electronic surveillance facilities. Besides that the EXMD was also assigned to defend the vital transportation links between Xinjiang and China, with three PLA infantry divisions

⁴⁹ Donald H. McMillen, "The Urumchi Military Region Defence and Security in China's West," Asian Survey, Vol. 22, No. 8, August 1982, P. 705.

stationed here. And finally, was the Southern Xinjiang Military District (SXMD) that covered the security of the Tarim Basin and border areas of Tibet. There were three PLA infantry divisions stationed in the SXMD. The Air Force Command of UMR was located in Urumqi, with airbases in all the three military districts. Since 1976, priority was given to upgrading the military capabilities of the UMR by improving the firepower and mobility of the existing units. The UMR had dual responsibilities of maintaining a credible defence against external attacks such as from the USSR and internal unrest in the region.

Lop Nur in Southern Xinjiang was China's primary nuclear test site.⁵⁰ Since the testing of China's first atomic bomb in October 1964, 42 nuclear tests (both atmospheric and underground) have conducted thus far in Lop Nur.⁵¹ It was also believed that China had deployed Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBM) and Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM) in the caves and bunkers of the Altai Mountains,⁵² as part of China's defence strategy against the USSR. Most of these missiles were targetted at the USSR's military installations and cities in Soviet Central Asia as well as India.⁵³ During the Cold War in the 1980s, the United States of America (USA) co-operated with the Chinese in joint electronic intelligence gathering to monitor USSR's Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) test in Central Asia. The joint electronic intelligence gathering station was located in the mountains of Xinjiang, with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) providing the equipment and China the technicians.

⁵⁰ *Central Asia Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1967, p. 90.

⁵¹ <http://www.eastturkistan.com/reports/uhrc.hr.html>

⁵² Donald H. McMillen, "The Urumchi Military Region Defence and Security in China's West," p. 718.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 719.

As such, Beijing successfully consolidated its position in Xinjiang. Although reforms were undertaken in the 1980s, it did not change the basic pattern of the Han dominated CCP role in the UMR. The militarisation of Xinjiang province was the result of the Sino-Soviet rivalry and prevention of possible Turkic uprisings. Because Xinjiang was considered vital for China's defence, Beijing increased its military installations within the region. As the region became more 'Chinese' either through sinofication or colonization of Han migrants, the PRC felt increasingly compelled to defend the region at all costs either from the possibility Russian intrusion or a Turkic uprising. However, the process of militarisation and Chinese colonisation threatened the survival of the Turkics and such as created resentment toward such policies because Beijing had turned Xinjiang into a battle zone. The Turkic leaders were further humiliated when they were not consulted before the CCP decided to transform the province into China's western frontier. In spite of all these, the presence of the PLA in Xinjiang increasingly strengthened Chinese position in Xinjiang vis-à-vis the Turkics.